

## Beautiful Thing by EvieSmallwood

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**Summary:**

Mike Wheeler can be romantic. Sure, sometimes romance involves nearly catching his house on fire and losing his shirt, but he can *do* it.

or:

a dinner yet again goes awry.

## Beautiful Thing

### Author's Note:

- For .

This was meant to be posted yesterday, and THEN I meant to have it up hours ago, but alas, I was d e l a y e d.

Anyway, here it is!

(for the lovely hannah, who made me the PRETTIEST moodboard ever i love it so much still skdhjdjh and i love you)

Oh, by the way, this is named after the Grace Vanderwaal song “Beautiful Thing”. I swear that girl is literally out here writing Mileven Anthoms.

*One, two, three... done.*

Mike shakes the flame from the end of the match, stepping back to admire his work.

The room is full of candles, making the room glow with amber light. Dozens of shadows flicker, giving it all a mystifying (or maybe hypnotic) energy.

Maybe she'll like it. Hopefully she will.

Or maybe she'll be disgusted, and totally creeped out. Maybe she won't even understand what the hell all of this is—because her main knowledge of this particular holiday is that it's a 'Hallmark scam'.

Mayfield needs to learn how to keep her mouth closed.

It's not like Mike *believes* in Valentine's Day; he knows it's all just an excuse for stores to rake in cash, and in the past they've pretty much ignored the holiday, but still... Isn't this something boyfriends are *supposed* to do? And what if it's something she's secretly always

wanted but won't say?

(because even if the holiday isn't real, their love is, and that matters more. he'll take any excuse to prove that)

Mike nods, satisfied with his reasoning.

Reasoning that he's been mulling over all day, coming to the same conclusion multiple times, but still letting those doubts creep in.

Whatever he does, she doesn't deserve anything less than flawless. Fact.

He stirs the sauce on the stove, before moving over to the noodles and checking their doneness (not nearly ready).

Unfortunately, the lock clicks just then. Mike nearly drops the pan lid. He grabs it with the wrong, ungloved hand and hisses in pain at the unexpected heat.

(it has to be her, it can't be his parents; they're out of town, and Holly is staying over at a friend's house, it can't be anyone but her)

"Fuck," he mutters. "Shit, fuck—"

"Mike?"

He sucks in a sharp breath and leans against the counter, trying to look as casual as possible. He can't be all jumpy and shift and strung up about something so... normal. It's *just* a holiday. It's just a dinner.

(a dinner that's so not ready, *he's* not ready, he's never prepared for the sight of her and she's always taking his breath away, like now)

She comes into view, and damn if she doesn't look fantastic. Her curly hair is pulled back into two lopsided braids, her eyes are glinting in contrast to the dimness of the room, and she's smiling through clear confusion. He bites his lip, gaze falling lower, to her (slightly shorter than usual) skirt and plain white button down.

*Pretty.*

“What’s all this?”

Her tone is laced with sheer curiosity. Mike clears his throat and prays that his heartbeat’ll steady soon. “It’s... dinner.”

“I can see that,” El slips her backpack off her shoulder. “What happened to the lights?”

She’s messing around. She *has* to be. After all of those old Hollywood movies she’s watched, all of those soaps. He’d chop off his right arm if someone told him that not once had anyone pulled something like this.

“It’s romantic,” Mike grabs a loaf of bread and starts cutting. Ambiance, his mother had mentioned once (in referral to her nightly baths, sure, but *still*). Max had used the term ‘love vibes’ when he’d mentioned the dinner and candles and flowers—

*Shit. Flowers.*

El is next to him, already starting to spread butter across a piece—the way she’d taught him to from one of her books; break off a piece and top that, and so on and so fourth.

“How is it romantic if I can’t see you?”

Mike swallows. (*Where did I put them, where did I put them...?*) “I, uh... y’know. It sets the mood.”

*Oh yeah.*

“The mood?”

“Yeah,” he skirts around the counter.

El follows. “What mood, exactly?”

He’s rushing toward the basement steps, hoping against hope that he left them down there and not somewhere else. Any other time he might have noticed her teasing, expectant tone, but his head is so full it’s practically overflowing.

Mike stops before he opens the door. “Can you, like, stay up here?”

El raises her eyebrow. “Why?”

“Because...” *An excuse, Wheeler, honestly*— “the stove. Can you watch it?”

“Oh,” El nods. “Okay.”

Mike grins, which makes her eyes light up, and suddenly he’s worried she thinks he’s mad at her. Quickly, he presses a kiss to her cheek (mad, honestly, *how*) and then hurries down into the basement.

Thank god, they’re still on the table; wrapped up and fresh and pink. He’s never bought her flowers, before. In the past, he’d seen daisies or carnations on his way to the cabin or her house and picked them. But roses... those mean something more, he thinks. They’re like, a symbol.

Mike grabs those, as well as the envelope and note he’d only just finished (stuffed under the couch cushions from where he’d stashed it when his mom had come down earlier).

“What’s that?”

Mike jumps, whirling around. “El!”

“Relax, I turned the stove off,” she comes closer, trying to see behind his back (its impossible, he assures himself, shifting even so; he’s like a foot taller than her). “What are you hiding, Stringy?”

*Oh, what the hell.*

“Stuff,” he sighs, relenting. Mike holds it out. “For you.”

“Oh.” Her time takes on a high pitch. Surprise, maybe? But it usually doesn’t sound like that; so strained. “Thank you.”

“You don’t like it?”

All of the blood leaves his head. The bottom leaves his stomach. *Oh, god.*

“No!” She hugs the items to her chest a little defensively. “I just... feel bad. I didn’t get you a gift. I thought we weren’t doing anything this year.”

He can feel the tension leaving his body. “That’s okay,” he takes her hand. “I don’t mind.”

“You’re sure?”

*(only gift I ever needed was you)*

“Yeah. Definitely.” Mike leans forward and kisses her nose, which automatically wrinkles even though she snuggles closer into his embrace. Mike breathes in the scent of her perfume; something soft and fresh, which brings a flush to his cheeks. He’s so easily consumed by her, and constantly finds himself swept away.

Like now, with his lips on her own *(when had that happened?)*, with his arm around her waist, pulling her close—as close as possible.

El drops the gifts, and it’s okay, because he’s hardly even paying attention. All that matters is that there’s nothing separating them anymore. Her hands are warm; one against his hot cheek and the other playing with the hair at the nape of his neck.

He might *actually* be melting.

*(heart slamming against his chest, hot blood in his veins, pressing himself against her and grinning when she gasps at the contact)*

Mike puts his hand against the side of her head and she leans against it, allowing him access to the pale expanse of her neck. He swiftly brushes away the stray, strawberry scented strands of hair and leans down, first brushing his lips against her skin and then kissing her there.

She sighs, going slightly limp in his arms. Mike loves that he can make her fall apart like this. He loves the feeling of holding her up, loves the way she grasps a fistful of hair when he starts to suck rather than kiss.

“Mike,” she mumbles weakly, when he starts to pull away, “more.”

Oh.

Okay.

It sounds like a plead, almost. Mike's whole face heats, but it's not with anything other than pure satisfaction and that raw, indescribable glowing that fills his stomach when she's around. He obliges, eagerly, kissing so hard he bruises her, across her collarbone and her shoulders and neck. Each one makes her sigh and moan, leaning back a little so that he doesn't have to strain, giving herself to him.

Mike stares at her for a full two seconds. He takes in the way she's open and wanting and wide eyed, before grabbing her by the waist and *lifting*.

El's thighs clench around his waist almost automatically. She kisses him as he carries her over to the couch, and fuck it's weird that he has to lean up (but he also sort of likes it).

He lays her down on the ratty old couch, looming over her. Her arms are up over her head and her pupils are blown. Mike is certain their hearts are both racing in unison.

"More," she says, but it sounds more like a decision than a demand.

And then, before he can even comprehend it, she jerks his shirt over his head.

El's lips are warm and soft. Her tongue brushes over his skin with each kiss. It's galvanising, perfectly invigorating; it makes him groan. Everything feels a little like it's on fire, it even *smells* like it—

"Is something burning?"

El's withdraw from him is so abrupt it makes him grunt. His eyes fly open. "What?"

"I smell smoke," her tone grows more urgent with each word. El squirms, but Mike is already rolling off of her, taking the steps two at a time. The only coherent thoughts his mind conjures are *candles* and *fuck*.

It's not the candles, though. Smoke—not too dark and not a lot—has filled the kitchen. Mike coughs, rushing over to the oven. He grabs a mit and then yanks the chicken out, struggling to breathe.

*Shit, shit, shit.*

It's so blackened it might as well be a lump of char.

El appears, looking worried. That worry turns into annoyance when she sees the cause of the smoke, though. She frowns. "What is that? Or what... what *was* it?"

Mike purses his lips. "Our dinner."

She gives him a look: *no shit*. "Were you trying to make chicken?"

He returns it: *no shit*. "Yeah."

He expects her to be exasperated or displeased, but then she bursts into laughter.

*What?*

"Oh, Mike," she giggles, wrapping her arm around his waist and falling into his chest. "I'm sorry."

Mike doesn't know what to think. He doesn't know whether to be embarrassed or laugh with her. "Um."

She looks up at him. "You're cute."

"I forgot it," he explains with a stupid, sudden smile.

"I'm gonna open a window," she proclaims breathlessly, after a minute, drawing away. "Why don't you throw that out?"

"I was thinking of holding onto it, actually," he says. "Sentimental value, and all that."

"Our first disaster date?"

Mike mocks outrage. "It wasn't a *disaster*—"



"This room smells like a hair salon that caught on fire," El reaches out and cracks a window with her powers.

Mike places a hand over his heart. "That hurts," he says, even though it doesn't. He's more along the line of *thank god I'm not the only one*.

The headache he's slowly developing is so not worth it.

She rolls her eyes, but concern quickly twists her features. She takes his hands. "You know, you don't have to do all this for me."

"Translation," Mike plays with her fingers, "'Please don't ever try to be romantic again because you suck at it.'"

El gives him a light push. "No," she says. "I just mean, I don't... Like stuff like this? Like, a lot of stuff? A lot of smells, and expectations, and sounds..."

*Oh.*

He suddenly feels horribly, stupidly awful. *Of course*. "Oh my god, I suck."

"No!" She grabs his face in her hands but he really, really feels like shit, and her looking guilty isn't helping his guilt. "*No*, it's okay—"

"It's so not," he can't believe it hadn't occurred to him; all the times she's just preferred something small ('no fuss'), something quiet. Usually, he'll be the one to think of it before anyone else does. '*Maybe we shouldn't go to the movies tonight, I'm tired,*' when El looks run down. '*Maybe we should just stay home and order pizza,*' when the suggestion of going out causes her face to turn white.

But of course, he had to do all of *this*, and ruin everything.

"Yes, it is!" El wraps her arms around his neck and gives him that *don't be stupid* look, the one she learned and mastered from Hopper. "You were trying to be sweet. If anything, it's my fault for being so screwed up. Normal girls are supposed to want things like this."

All inner monologue pauses, leaving him with a forceful, instinctual: *no*.

“Screw normal,” he pushes her hair from her eyes. *Wild. Dangerous. Bold. Perfect.* “I love you, Shortstack.”

“Yeah?”

“Yeah,” he nods, please don’t ever doubt that ever, “and I’m also super relieved I won’t have to pull shit like this again. Do you have any idea how many matches I used?”

El smirks. “Did it ever occur to you to use a lighter?”

“I was making an effort,” he insists. “Twenty five matches for the love of my life, no more, no less.”

She grins, but there’s something soft around the edges. “Only twenty five?”

(and after this, twenty five will become significant in some coincidental manner; twenty five daisies in a hand-picked bunch; twenty five steps down the aisle; twenty five seconds before she decides to take the leap; twenty five hours before a bundle is placed in their arms and even though it’s not kicking and screaming, it’s still theirs and they’ll still love it for the ten minutes they get to hold it; twenty five kisses before an ‘I love you’; the twenty fifth of august, nineteen eighty-nine)

“Yeah,” he nods, “and we’re gonna have to blow out every one before we leave.”

El frowns. “Leave?”

“Wanna go get burgers with me?”

It’s not exactly a proposal, but at least she says yes.

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It’s drizzling as they approach Benny’s. The neon lights reflect against the wet blacktop. Mike holds the door for El, who ducks inside with a smile.

(his favourite smile)

El leads him, their fingers lazily intertwined, to their favourite booth. In the back, by the window, but still private enough with the small alcove the corner wall provides.

Mike slides in first. El squeezes his hand. "I'm gonna get us something to eat, okay?"

He nods. She slips away, and for some reason, her absence is straining. Even if she's just twelve feet away, on her tip toes and leaning over the red linoleum counter, he feels deprived.

Mike leans against the window. His breath fogs the glass. He draws a frowny face in it, matching the expression. Outside, cars pass, slow and sparse. It feels like ages before she's tapping his shoulder with something cold.

It's a milkshake glass, full to the brim of chocolate liquid. "Want me to sit across or next to you?"

Mike feels a churning in stomach. "Next to me," he says, pulling her down. He pulls her close, propping a leg up so she can lean against his chest.

Something clicks, and he's complete.

They share the milkshake. A few minutes later, Martha brings their burger over with a basket of fries.

"So did you send off the application?"

Mike nods. "Yeah."

Yesterday. Noon. Bright sunshine and a blue sky, a mailbox, and his shaking hands.

El shifts against him, scooting just a little closer; part of the unconscious desire they share between them—be together, always, with no space and no secrets.

"How long do you think it'll take to hear back?"

"Don't know," he replies, because he really doesn't; it's a fucking late

application, considering, but his dad had pulled strings being a graduate of TH himself. Mike would have applied earlier, but he'd been so set on universities out of state, and then they'd (fought) had their disagreement about all of it, and he'd been deliberating on what the hell to do in the meantime.

The solution of Terre Haute was an obvious one, but one he hadn't considered given his parents had always pressured him about Ivy Leagues and expensive, uber-respected universities.

Terre Haute was... it was literally fine. Great. And the ultimate solution to like, every problem.

*Sometimes, your total obliviousness just blows my mind.*

Still, he doesn't like talking about it. The subject makes his skin crawl. College is tricky; he's both anticipating the experience (not to mention getting away from his parents), and dreading the idea of being so far from home.

From El.

Impulsively, he holds her a little tighter. "Don't wanna go," he mutters, pressing his face into his neck. Maybe if they become one person it won't even matter.

"You're not going anywhere, yet," El tickles his cheek with a fry. "You're stuck with me."

*Forever, I hope.*

*(I know)*

Mike lunges for the fry.

---

When the milkshake is down to its dregs and the diner has nearly cleared out, Mike pulls the envelope out of his pocket and lays it on the table.

"You didn't open that."

El's eyes widen. "God, Mike," she's all earnest and apologetic, "I'm so sorry."

"It's okay," he says, and it really is. Especially because making out on his couch and nearly burning down his house was totally worth it.

She takes the envelope, tearing it sloppily with a finger. Her eyes flicker to him when she peeks inside, before removing yet another envelope, and the note.

"Okay, so," Mike leans closer, "the original plan was to do all this in like August, but I got too many ideas and too carried away."

El raises her eyebrows. "I need more context."

"Right!" He nods. "So, these are letters. Like, a bunch. There's maybe thirty in here I think. I wrote like half of them over the school year—you'll see the dates—but you can't read them, yet. They're all labelled. Ones for when you're sad, or you're happy, or you miss me. It's probably like super cheesy, but I was just writing one day, and—"

He's cut off as her lips crash onto his, sweet and salty, her hands on his cheeks. He feels a little lightheaded (heart slamming against his rib-cage, breath gone) when she draws away.

There's a tear on her jawline. He contemplates wiping it away, but then leans down and kisses the spot.

"Mike," she sniffs. "Thank you."

"I just... Don't want it to be so hard, y'know?"

She nods, briefly settling into his arms. "I know." El stays there for a minute, and he's so content he could fall asleep, but she's pulling out of the booth, extending her hand to him. "We should go."

Mike grabs her wrist, letting her haul him up from the seat. They wave to Martha and then walk out. The cool night air is freezing on his face, like a hard slap. Within seconds his hair is damp.

And then, halfway across the lot, as he's fumbling for his keys with numb fingers and she's watching with amusement, it starts pouring.

They're drenched. With a clap of thunder and her surprised yelp, he's pulling her closer.

"Mike, what—?"

He dips her back a little (fuck if this isn't cliché, but he'll take cliché as long as it's with her), and she gasps before he kisses her. Their sopping hair is in their eyes, not to mention the rain, but she holds onto him and kisses him back. Repeatedly.

They're absolutely gonna get hypothermia.

Mike forces himself to righten her and pull away. He rests his forehead against hers, shivering, and squeezes her hand.

"Happy Valentine's Day, Shortstack."

### **Author's Note:**

KISSES IN THE RAIN ARE LIFE.

Okay, so, I DO have something to mention that I'm literally not even upset about, I just wanted to clarify for you guys: I won't be writing any smut for these two.

I know these fics can get really heavy on the physical stuff sometimes, and I do go into detail when it comes to them making out, but I truly just don't even feel comfortable writing full on second base, it's just... not gonna happen.

That said, I just wanna state again I'm not upset with anyone who asked or anything! It's totally okay! I just wanna let you guys know so you're not like, expecting it. The most that's gonna happen is vague hinting and light allusions, I've already like implied they've had sex, but yeah.

Thank you guys so much for reading by the way! I'm

super super grateful to all of you for your wonderful comments and your support :D

By the way I totally forgot how the fuck normal people like apply for college YIKES

Come talk to me on my tumblr: @mad-maxxy!

(like seriously come send asks or scream about mileven with me I WANNA TALK TO Y'ALL SO BAD DONT BE SHY)